

Teaching Leads With Mentor Texts:

This lesson typically takes a number of days to complete, but the actual number of days will depend upon the number of books, number of students, and the amount of discussion. The many types of leads are known by different names, as you will see as you look at various resources. You will find that it doesn't matter what we actually call them, as long as you and your students use an appropriate/ common vocabulary.

Preparation:

Gather enough quality novels (at appropriate reading levels for your class) for each student, or pair of students, to have one to look at and share. (Choose novels that model a variety of captivating leads; see attached list of novels and leads for some ideas of books to use.)

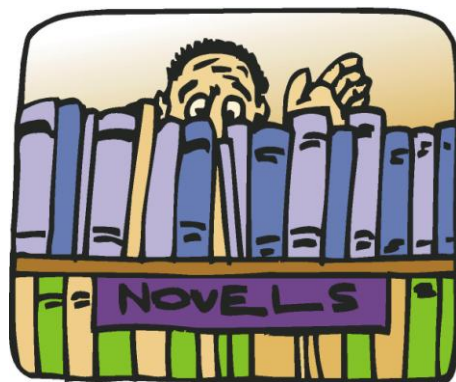
Place novels in piles on student tables or carpet/common area.

Teaching the lesson:

- Have students (individually, or with a partner) choose a book and read the beginning. Tell them to think about how the author starts the story. Elizabeth and Gregory Cowan say, "You must hook the reader immediately. You probably have about two sentences, or 20 seconds, to do that." **[Note: This is shorter than the typical lead for an expository essay, which needs to do more setting up of the essay.]**
 - Does it grab their attention?
 - Does it make them want to keep reading... to find out more?
 - What is happening as the story begins... can they get a mental picture from the author's words?
- Ask, "Who has a lead that grabs your attention and makes you want to continue reading?"
 - Have the student(s) share the lead with the class. (You may need to help them with where to stop reading. It is sometimes a bit longer because it doesn't end in the middle of a thought or sentence.)
- Ask students what the author is doing with that lead. How is he/she grabbing the reader's attention? [Refer to the attached page of sample class notes to choose which category best fits the lead.]

- Identify the name and description of the type of lead, along with the book title. Using chart paper, an overhead projector, or a document camera and projector, begin a class list of mentor texts/ leads. As you create the master class notes, have students copy the titles/ authors/ leads in their Writer's Notebook. [For students who have difficulty with note taking, provide copies of your notes, once complete, to add to their notebook.]
- Ask students, "Who thinks their book has the same type of lead?" When a student shares, ask the class if they agree that this lead fits the same category you've been discussing. If they agree, add that title to the list for that type of lead. (If not, tell them the example actually fits another type of lead that will come up in the discussion later- make a note to come back to that student when looking for an example of a new type of lead.) **[Note: Many strong leads fit more than one category of lead. Have class discuss which category fits best- or they can list it in more than one.]**
- When there are no more examples for a particular type of lead, return to an example which was shared earlier, but did not fit the lead given. Have that student (or pair of students) shares their lead again.
- Continue this process until you have navigated the piles of novels, and created a resource of notes listing types of leads, along with mentor texts, create a master list of models... title, author, lead. Make copies for the class, and have students tape or glue them inside their Writer's Notebooks.

As students write, throughout the year, have them use this resource to help them develop the best lead for each piece they write.



[This is an example from one group of students. Your notes should evolve along with your class discussion and sharing of leads.]



Notes on Narrative Leads

A lead is the first few sentences of a piece of writing. It needs to grab the reader's attention in around 20 seconds, making them anxious to continue reading.

Some Types of Narrative Leads

The Action Lead:

Story begins right in the middle of the action. (Igraine the Brave, Milkweed, When Zachary Beaver Came to Town)

Thought Lead:

A character or the narrator is thinking out loud, and maybe "speaking" to the reader. (Lightning Thief, The Name of This Book is Secret, This Book is Not Good for You, The Tail of Emily Windsnap)

The Descriptive Lead:

The lead paints a picture in the reader's mind. (The Last Treasure, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone)

The Problem (Question) Lead:

Shows the problem to be solved (or question to be answered). It makes the reader curious. (Gathering Blue, The Hunger Games, Things Not Seen)

The Dialogue Lead:

Story begins right in the middle of a character speaking. (Ida B., A Mango Shaped Space, Allie Finkle's Rules for Girls)

The Narrative Lead:

Story w/in a story... It wraps the reader in action, description, color, and mood. (The Tapestry, Every Soul a Star)

The Anecdotal Lead: (Challenging for primary grades and many 4th and 5th graders)

Shows character's personality and gives a glimpse of the personality at work. (Similar to the narrative lead, but more like the character is "talking to" the reader.) (The Magic Thief, The Big One-Oh)

The Flat Statement Lead: (Challenging for primary grades and many 4th and 5th graders)

Begins with a simple declarative statement and then connects it with the story. (Boys are Dogs)

The leads on the next pages were collected by one class as they explored the beginnings of a variety of mentor texts and discussed their favorites. Each group of students should gather their own collection to use as mentor leads for their writing. [Notice that this is different from the notes taken by the class, because it actually includes the leads.]

On the next pages, you will find a list of examples of leads collected by one group of students. You and your students will develop your own, but this is a good starting point.

Narrative Leads

The Dialogue Lead:

A Mango-Shaped Space

By: Wendy Mass:

"A is for Amy who fell down the stairs," says my best friend, Jenna Davis, as we climb farther down into the steep, parched ravine. We've been inseparable since we were five and her mother brought her to my house to play. We bonded over the various ways we could contort my Barbie and Ken dolls without breaking them. Let's just say that Ken won't be having children anytime soon and leave it at that.

Ida B.

By: Katherine Hannigan

"Ida B," Mama said to me on one of those days that start right and just keep heading toward perfect until you go to sleep, "when you're done with the dishes, you can go play. Daddy and I are going to be working till dinner."

Gathering Blue

By: Lois Lowry

"Mother?"

There was no reply. She hadn't expected one. Her mother had been dead now for four days, and Kira could tell that the last of the spirit was drifting away.

Love, Ruby Lavender

By: Deborah Wiles

"Murderers! You can't have them all!" Ruby Lavender leaned out the car window and shook her fist. The car lurched to a halt in the dirt yard of Peterson's Egg Ranch, and Ruby scrambled out the door. She ran in bar feet as fast as she could into a dusty sea of chickens—a sea of chickens being herded toward their death at the chopping block.

The Action Lead:

Igraine the Brave

By: Cornelia Funke

Igraine woke up because something was crawling over her face. Something with a lot of legs. She opened her eyes and there it was, sitting right on the end of her nose, a fat black spider. Igraine was scared stiff of spiders.

Milkweed

By: Jerry Spinelli

I am running.

That's the first thing I remember. Running. I carry something, my arm curled around it, hugging it to my chest. Bread, of course. Someone is chasing me. "Stop! Thief!" I run. People. Shoulders. Shoes. "Stop! Thief!"

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town

By: Kimberly Willis Holt

Nothing ever happens in Antler, Texas. Nothing much at all. Until this afternoon, when an old blue Thunderbird pulls a trailer decorated with Christmas lights into the Dairy Maid parking lot. The red words painted on the trailer cause quite a buzz around town, and before an hour is up, half of Antler is standing in line with two dollars clutched in hand to see the fattest boy in the world.

The Last Treasure

By: Janet S. Anderson

It is night, just after midnight on June 8. Somewhere in the Midwest on a rickety bed in a cheap motel, a boy who never dreams is dreaming. His dream is crazy, and he thrashes restlessly, trying even in his sleep to shake it into sense. Miles away, almost half the country away, in a tract house in a California town, a girl who dreams too often is sinking into nightmare. She's had other nightmares, but this one is different. This one is worse.

The Thought Lead:

So B. It

By: Sarah Weeks

If truth was a crayon and it was up to me to put a wrapper around it and name its color, I know just what I would call it—*dinosaur skin*. I used to think, without really thinking about it, that I knew what color was. But that was a long time ago, before I knew what I know now about both dinosaur skin and the truth.

California Blue

By: David Klaas

I don't know why running through a redwood forest has always made me think of death.

It's not because I grew up in a mill town—I don't run between the trees seeing five-hundred-foot-tall piles of sawdust or neatly stacked lumber or endless reams of paper. And it's not because of the darkness where the old growth is thickest, although as I pounded along the narrow forest trail, the massive trees pressed in against each other in the twilight, and the smell of the wood and leaves was damp and lightly sweet and faintly bloodlike.

The Name of this Book is Secret

By: Pseudonymous Bosch

WARNING: DO NOT READ BEYOND THIS PAGE!

Good.

Now I know I can trust you.

You're curious. You're brave. And you're not afraid to lead a life of crime.

But let's get something straight: if, despite my warning, you insist on reading this book, you can't hold me responsible for the consequences.

This Book is Not Good for You

By: Pseudonymous Bosch

Oh. It's you.

Thank Goodness.

For a second, I thought it was—well, never mind what I thought.

The question is: what am I going to do with you?

The Descriptive Lead:

The Last Treasure

By: Janet S. Anderson

It is night, just after midnight on June 8. Somewhere in the Midwest on a rickety bed in a cheap motel, a boy who never dreams is dreaming. His dream is crazy, and he thrashes restlessly, trying even in sleep to shake it into sense. Miles away, almost half the country away, in a tract house in a California town, a girl who dreams too often is sinking into nightmare. She's had other nightmares, but this one is different. This one is worse.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

By: J.K.Rowling

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Iqbal

By Francesco D'Adamo (Translated by: Ann Leonori)

The house of our master, Hussain Khan, was in the outskirts of Lahore, not far from the dusty, dry countryside where flocks of sheep from the north grazed.

It was a big house...

Atherton: House of Power

By: Patrick Carman

In Mr. Ratikan's grove there lived a boy. He was not well-to-do, but his needs were met and he was happy most of the time. His name was Edgar.

The Problem (Question) Lead:

Gathering Blue

(see Dialogue Lead)

James and the Giant Peach

By: Roald Dahl

Until he was four years old, James Henry Trotter had had a happy life. He lived peacefully with his mother and father in a beautiful house beside the sea. There were always plenty of other children for him to play with, and there was the sandy beach for him to run about on, and the ocean to paddle in. It was the perfect life for a small boy.

The Hunger Games

By: Suzanne Collins

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping.

Things Not Seen

By Andrew Clements

It's a Tuesday morning in February, and I get up as usual, and I stumble into the bathroom to take a shower in the dark. Which is my school-day method because it's sort of like an extra ten minutes of sleep.

It's after the shower. That's when it happens.

It's when I turn on the bathroom light and wipe the fog off the mirror to comb my hair. It's what I see in the mirror. It's what I don't see.

I took a second time, and then rub at the mirror again.

I'm not there.

That's what I'm saying.

I'm. Not. There.

The Wednesday Wars

By: Gary D. Schmidt

Of all the kids in the seventh grade at Camillo Junior High, there was one kid that Mrs. Baker hated with heat whiter than the sun.

Me.

And let me tell you, it wasn't for anything I'd done.

Boys are Dogs

By: Leslie Margolis

Summer was officially over. There would be no more swimming, snorkeling, or bodysurfing in the cool blue waves. No more relay races, and no more circling the campfire to sing songs and toast marshmallows.

The Narrative Lead:

Every Soul a Star

By: Wendy Mass

In Iceland, fairies live inside of rocks. Seriously. They have houses in there and schools and amusement parks and everything.

Besides me, not many people outside of Iceland know this. But you just have to read the right books and it's all there. When you're homeschooled, you have a lot of books. I also know how to find every constellation in the sky, and that the brightest star in any constellation is called the Alpha. I know all the constellations because my father taught them to me, and I know about the Alpha because it is also my name. But my family and friends call me Ally.

Belle Prater's Boy

By: Ruth White

Around 5:00 a.m. on a warm Sunday morning in October 1953, my Aunt Belle left her bed and vanished from the face of the earth.

Al Capone Does My Shirts

By: Gennifer Choldenko

Today I moved to a twelve-acre rock covered with cement, topped with bird turd and surrounded by water. Alcatraz sits smack in the middle of the bay—so close to the city of San Francisco, I can hear them call the score on a baseball game on Marina Green. Okay, not that close. But still.

Chasing Vermeer

By: Blue Balliett

On a warm October night in Chicago, three deliveries were made in the same neighborhood. A plump tangerine moon had just risen over Lake Michigan. The doorbell had been rung at each place, and an envelope left propped outside.

The Changeling

By: Zilpha Keatley Snyder

Martha Abbott woke up on the seventh day of April and sat straight up in bed with her eyes wide open. That in itself, was significant. As long as she could remember she had always awakened slowly and cautiously, testing yesterday gingerly with the tip of memory, before taking the plunge into cold bright consciousness. But on that April morning she had no choice. Something had reached deep into her dream and jolted her awake—and then quickly faded, leaving behind only four definite words. *Something's going to happen!*

The Flat Statement Lead:

The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts

By: Richard Peck

If your teacher has to die, August isn't a bad time of year for it. You know August. The corn is earring. The tomatoes are ripening on the vine. The clover's in full bloom. There's a little less evening now, and that's a warning. You want to live every day twice over because you'll be back in the jailhouse of school before the end of the month.